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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000638

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2016
TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [UZ](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: TASHKENT-BASED ISRAELI UPDATES EMBASSY ON
TURKMENISTAN'S JEWISH DIASPORA

Classified By: CDA JENNIFER BRUSH FOR REASONS 1.4 (B and D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) On June 6, Conoff met with Anatoli Livshitz, the Tashkent-based Israeli Consular and Immigration officer who came to Ashgabat to conduct immigrant visa interviews for Turkmenistani Jews to immigrate to Israel. Livshitz told Conoff that despite Turkmenistan's resource wealth and strategic location in Central Asia, Tel Aviv does not have a definitive policy towards Turkmenistan. While Israel took a great interest in sustaining other diasporas in the former Soviet republics, it appears that Israel does not take much interest in the Jews of Turkmenistan, something that the local Jewish community does not seem to entirely mind. END SUMMARY.

TURKMENISTAN'S (SHRINKING?) JEWISH COMMUNITY

¶2. (SBU) According to Livshitz, Turkmenistan's Jewish community currently numbers 700 people. (Note: Local community members put their numbers at around 1500. End Note.) This year's immigration interviews netted 40 immigrants who will soon immigrate to Israel.

¶3. (SBU) Livshitz said that Israel's main concern with Turkmenistan's Jewish community was its sustainability. Since the community is small, unorganized, and unregistered, it is very difficult for Jewish life to thrive here, unlike in other Central Asian countries. The community depends on the meager support that comes from Israel (Note: The community also receives assistance from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. End Note.) He thanked post for "keeping an eye out" on the local community and involving them in embassy events (like the recent Holocaust memorial event post hosted in April) since such attention and inclusion is very important to the community's morale.

ISRAEL-TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS, OR LACK THEREOF

¶4. (SBU) Livshitz said that Israel, while maintaining diplomatic relations with Turkmenistan, really does not have a specific policy with the country. Conoff informed Livshitz that he and the Charge recently met with Mikhail Mirkin, the Israeli representative of Merhav, who is also Turkmenistan's Honorary Consul in Israel (Note: While meeting with the Charge, Mirkin, who at first was critical of Niyazov and his policies, praised Niyazov's policies in Turkmenistan and criticized USG efforts to promote democracy in Turkmenistan

AS "premature." End Note.) Livshitz said that Mirkin declined several requests to meet while he was in Ashgabat.

COMMENT

15. (C) Unlike other Jewish diasporas in the former Soviet Union, Turkmenistan's small and unorganized Jewish community appears to attract little if any interest from Tel Aviv, except during regional consular circuit rides through the region. The Israeli immigration agency Sokhnut has an unofficial representation office in Ashgabat where the community gathers to celebrate holidays. As seen by the low level of importance Israel attaches to its relations with Turkmenistan, a country with no real Jewish history, Israel's policies here do not seem to indicate that unlike other former Soviet diasporas, they are interested in sustaining the longevity in Turkmenistan of the Jewish community .

16. (C) Despite not having a vibrant religious and cultural history, the ability to legally gather to worship, or Tel Aviv's safety umbrella, the Jews of Turkmenistan by and large appear to live a comfortable existence here, albeit with the same problems that all religious/social/minority groups in Turkmenistan face. Many are quick to point out economic reasons, not anti-Semitism (which is not a phenomena here), are the main impetus for immigration, and that some who have immigrated have returned to Turkmenistan. While there are some who seek to find their futures in Israel or Queens, New York, many more appear to be tolerating the status quo, at least for now. END COMMENT.
BRUSH